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A LETTER,

ADDRESSED TO THE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,

ON THE EXISTING

DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH JAPAN.

By Mr. THOMAS WALSH,

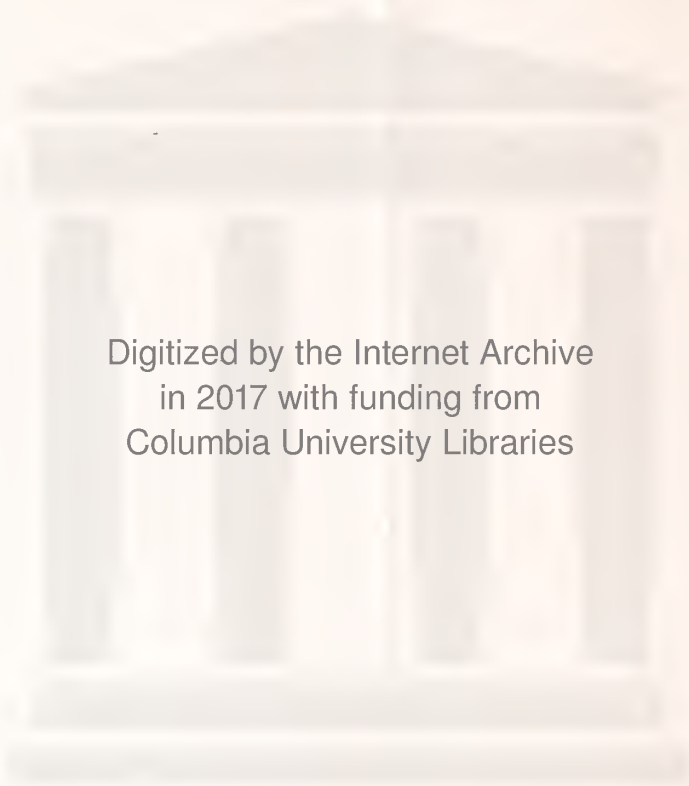
A MEMBER OF THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF NEW-YORK.

PRINTED BY THE ORDER OF THE CHAMBER.

New-York :

JOHN W. AMERMAN, PRINTER,
No. 47 CEDAR STREET.

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THE following letter, addressed to the President of the United States, on the existing Diplomatic Relations with Japan, by Mr. THOMAS WALSH, a member of the Chamber of Commerce, was presented to the Chamber, at its meeting held December 7th, 1871, and ordered to be printed for distribution.

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DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH JAPAN.

By Mr. THOMAS WALSH,

A MEMBER OF THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF NEW-YORK.

NEW-YORK, *November 7th*, 1871.

SIR,—In accordance with the wish expressed by you, at the interview with which you honored me last week, I now submit to you some observations on American relations with Japan.

Our commercial intercourse with that country began in 1858. At that date, and for some years afterwards, foreigners knew but little about the country, the peculiarities of its government, or the character of its people. It may be said, therefore, that all the Western Powers entered Japan equally ignorant on their own part, and equally under suspicion on the part of the Japanese.

The United States had, however, the advantage of priority among those to whom that long-closed land was opened; and as the Japanese learned that our nation had no other aim than to cultivate profitable commerce with them, and that intercourse with us involved no danger to their independence, they soon manifested a special good will towards Americans. This disposition our first minister, Mr. TOWNSEND HARRIS, endeavored to foster, and he was so far successful that, up to the time of his retirement, (1862,) his counsel was preferred to that of any other foreign representative; and American influence surpassed that of any foreign nation. The Japanese learned to trust him and his countrymen, and to feel that

in them they had friends who were, as a rule, honorable and considerate, both in their dealings and in their conduct.

The result of this cordiality of feeling was, that American commerce grew rapidly, and although our commercial establishments were soon outnumbered by the English and other Europeans, who controlled more capital, and supplied a greater variety of useful imports than we could furnish, yet American merchants succeeded, by means of intelligent enterprise and friendly behavior, in acquiring a larger proportion of the foreign trade of Japan, than their numbers or their capital alone would have enabled them to command.

Had our Government fairly appreciated the importance of maintaining this state of things, we should not now have to deplore the decline of American influence in a country where alone, amid all the vast and populous East, that influence had ever been distinctly felt or acknowledged. But our civil war, and the concentration of attention upon domestic affairs, which it required, led to a neglect of American interests in Japan, which afforded our European rivals an opportunity that they were not slow to seize.

England and France, fresh from the conquest of China, had quickly followed the United States to the doors of Japan, and had easily obtained entrance there on the same conditions. Jealous of each other, and anxious to extend their commerce and their influence, they soon perceived the necessity of nourishing, in every way, their relations with a land which was known to be the most populous, the most productive and the most highly developed of any country on the Pacific, and which was likely, at no very distant day, to become of serious importance to whoever should seek to dominate that great ocean.

Accordingly, these powers hastened to induce their great steamship companies, by liberal subsidies, to establish mail lines to Japan, and took care to send there, as ministers and consuls, able and earnest men, instructed both by special training and by special orders, to advance their nation's interests on every occasion, and to obtain the greatest possible power and influence in that rich and virgin field.

Great Britain showed special energy in this effort, and through her efficient consulates at every port, and her liberally appointed legation at the capital, diligently investigated the nature of the government, the character and habits of the people and the resources of the country. Each consulate had its students, whose duty it was to learn the language and explore the productions of the

consular district. The frequent and elaborate reports of these agencies guided the Minister in his action, and enabled him continually to enlighten his Government in regard to the organization, capacities and disposition of the Japanese nation. The Legation itself was also furnished with a numerous corps of highly educated and ambitious attaches, required to study the language, and acquaint themselves with the character and customs of the people, and stimulated to diligence therein by promises of preferment and the hope of permanent employment. A numerous and active naval squadron came to aid the civil officers, by explorations of the coast, by observations at ports not open to consuls or to merchant vessels, and by the impression of power and interest which such a force, and such a use of it, were certain to produce on the Japanese mind. Some exceptional attacks upon Englishmen were also availed of to debark at Yokohama a strong military force, which not only contributed to deepen this impression, but by the excursions, investigations and reports of its officers, rendered valuable aid to the Minister in his efforts to understand and influence the politics of the country.

By means of such agencies, all of which are still in full activity, and by the operations of a numerous and wealthy body of merchants, having the great advantage of being able to import many useful articles, not purchasable in America, on account of the high cost of production there, Great Britain has steadily gained ascendancy in a country, which, of all others in the Eastern world, most leaned towards the United States; which is our nearer neighbor, and which is destined herself to be a great naval and commercial power on the Pacific Ocean.

Thus has Great Britain profited by the absorption of American energies in our civil war; by the burdens which that struggle imposed on our exporting power; and by the resulting decline of our Eastern commerce, to take precedence of us in the most inviting foreign field which has ever been opened to American enterprise.

It was but a natural consequence of the possession of such advantages, that, at the crisis of the Japanese Revolution of 1868, which re-established in that country a pure monarchical government in place of the feudal organization that had previously existed, the intelligence and power of the British minister succeeded in turning the scale in favor of the party which he preferred, and in fastening

upon it an obligation to advance the interests which he so ably represents.

France has hitherto failed, through her national peculiarities, to attain the same advantage in Japan as England. But, nevertheless, her position there is superior to that of the United States, by reason of the more ample representation which she maintains. What she may lack in her commerce or her consulates, is compensated by the energy, ubiquity and devotion of her missionaries and proteges; and she has not omitted to imitate her great rival in lodging a considerable military force in Japanese territory; in maintaining a formidable fleet in Japanese waters; and in furnishing her legation at Yedo with an efficient staff, who keep it fully informed of all that occurs.

Germany, also, has not neglected her opportunity, but, even during her recent great war, kept at Yedo a well appointed legation, led by a most astute and accomplished minister, and supported by an active and patriotic corps of attaches and consuls.

Italy, Holland, Belgium, Spain and other European nations are also now in the field, and though they do not pretend to vie with the three greater powers, and have but little commerce to protect, yet they maintain legations; and having naturally more sympathy with European than with American interests, frequently combine adversely to the latter, rendering the efforts of the United States representatives so much the more difficult and laborious.

It is, sir, as you may readily conceive, no slight mortification to an American citizen, anxious that his country should occupy in Japan the position to which, for so many reasons, she is clearly entitled, to find himself obliged to declare that, having had so fair an opportunity to secure it, she has well nigh lost it by sheer indifference. Yet such must be the conviction of every one who has traced American intercourse with that rising and well-disposed nation.

It is true that the Japanese continue still friendly to Americans; that when they feel free to choose, they like to employ Americans to aid them in their efforts to acquire consideration among the nations; that they send many of their youths to study in American schools, and that they desire to extend their commerce with us. But it should be remembered that they are still feeble in force, inexperienced in international affairs, and dependent in a large measure upon the knowledge and good will of Western nations for assistance

to attain the position to which they aspire. Under such circumstances, the qualifications and status of the Western representatives in Japan, have a peculiar weight and value.

It is far from my intention to reflect, in the least degree, upon the present representative of the United States in that country. On the contrary, I think Mr. DeLONG well qualified for his post, thoroughly in earnest in the discharge of his duties, extraordinarily industrious, and of a temperament and character which entitle him to the esteem of all who know him. And I am assured that the Japanese like and respect him, while I have had personal experience of his zeal to promote and defend American interests. But he is under great disadvantages compared with his principal colleagues. While they have attaches who are familiar with the Japanese language, and therefore qualified to interpret correctly and skillfully; who mingle freely with the more intelligent Japanese, and thereby obtain valuable information; who study the literature and laws of the country, and so become acquainted with the ideas and institutions with which they have to deal, the United States minister has, or very recently had, neither secretary, clerk, interpreter nor attache to aid him in the duties of his office, but was obliged to do every part of those duties himself, even to the copying of his own despatches.

It is evident that a minister so situated, charged with the various interests of a great nation, and having often to act not only as a magistrate in respect to his fellow citizens, but also (owing to the peculiarities of Japanese tribunals) as their only defender in their controversies, cannot possibly perform the duties of his office with any satisfaction to himself, and cannot possibly equal his colleagues in diplomatic affairs. Mr. DeLONG feels this very keenly, and has written to the Government about it. His desire to serve his country has hitherto sustained him in a position which is not less painful to him than it is unworthy the American nation. But he is obliged to recognise the fact, that day by day, his colleagues, by means of their better information and better service, gain precedence of him, and that he cannot cope with them.

Private interests are not here in question. They suffer with all other American interests, by the disabilities of the American Legation; but our citizens in Japan and elsewhere have a habit of overcoming difficulties which has, thus far, enabled them to maintain their commercial position, despite their disadvantages. Nor shall I dwell upon the fact that the Japanese, in constructing their rail-roads,

coast lights, telegraphs, canals, docks, and other improvements, in all which they require foreign assistance, have found themselves almost obliged to employ Europeans, when they might have preferred Americans. It matters little what may be the nationality of the men who thus promote progress in Japan. But these employees serve as sources of information, and as active political missionaries for their own countries, and are of no small consequence in these respects. It is, therefore, of moment, that our country should be fairly represented among them.

But the greater question is, can the United States afford to maintain their present attitude of indifference to a nation consisting of nearly thirty-five millions of civilized, ingenious and productive people, our nearest Oriental neighbors, with whom we have already a trade of many millions per annum, and who are inclined to develop commercial and friendly relations with us? Is it not important to us, in view of our future on the Pacific, to convince this people that we are interested in them, and sincerely desirous to understand them, and to cultivate their good opinion? Ought not the republic to feel and manifest an earnest concern in the awakened activity of so numerous and highly organized a nation, dwelling in the only ocean where the American flag is still eminent? It is but twelve years since our commerce with Japan commenced, and it has had to contend with many hindrances. Yet to-day that commerce, deprived though it is of any aid from American exports, exceeds in value our whole commerce with either Russia, Austria, or Portugal, countries where we maintain tolerably well-equipped legations, though we have neither reason nor desire to obtain special advantages among their people.

I recognise the wisdom of Congress in recently raising the American Mission in Japan to equal rank with the Missions of the European powers.

But much more is requisite to enable us to recover the ground which our indifference has ceded to our ever watchful competitors. The Minister of the United States should not have to depend for his information upon what he can gather from his colleagues, or from the local newspapers, (all under British management,) or from his mercantile friends, or from his native servants, (often but spies.) Nor should he have to rely for his interpreters, as he does now, upon missionary volunteers, who know little of diplomatic language, nor upon chance scholars in merchants' offices, nor upon the timid and obsequious native employees of the Japanese

Government, who may betray him. He should have a staff of his own, whose members he could trust, and through whom he could conduct his business in an intelligent and efficient manner, which would impress upon the Japanese that this republic is not less concerned in its foreign affairs, than are the monarchies of Europe; that it is jealous of its reputation, and careful of its interests in Japan, and that it can afford to maintain its dignity there.

And this amelioration would not cost much. Young Americans, of good character and complete education, could be gathered from our colleges and schools, who would be glad of the chance of a career which Government employment would open to them. Merchants obtain such men without difficulty, and think them indispensable to their business. By the appropriation of not over twenty thousand dollars annually for student assistants to the legation and consulates in Japan, and the selection of young men of suitable character and ambition, a corps of useful attaches would be provided, whose acquirements and service would soon be worth to our national interests and influence far more than the small sum required to maintain them. If possible, some assurance should be given, (as is done in Great Britain,) that attainments and services would be appreciated and rewarded by promotion in office in Japan. But even if so just and stimulating a measure should be impracticable at present, the plan proposed would secure to the Government some very useful servants, and would ere long redeem our legation in Japan from its present unfortunate and discreditable condition.

It will probably be objected to these suggestions, that the United States desire no special political influence in Japan; that our interests there are purely commercial; and that, if our merchants there contrive to prosper under existing circumstances, no change is necessary.

But the obvious answer to these narrow objections is, that the progress which Japan is now rapidly making, her important position and probable future influence on the Pacific, and her vicinity to us, require us at least to understand her institutions and her policy, and to cultivate her friendship; and that we are not likely to do this by adherence to our present system, nor without some such improvement as I have suggested.

I regret, sir, that even this imperfect statement of the case should have obliged me to occupy your attention with so long a letter. But I have desired to avail myself of your invitation to describe the condition of American interests in Japan as clearly and as fully as

possible, feeling that the moment is critical, and that unless something be soon done to increase the efficiency, and improve the standing of our representation in that country, most of the advantages of our geographical relation to it, and most of the fruits of the costly expedition from the United States, which opened it to the world, will be irretrievably lost.

I am, sir, your most obedient servant,

THOMAS WALSH.

To his Excellency,

The President of the United States.

